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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 001214

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS, PRM - RMACKLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS:

SUBJECT: NEPAL: POLICE DETAIN 19 UNDOCUMENTED TIBETANS

REF: KATHMANDU 1074

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: EMBASSY DISCUSSIONS WITH NEPAL'S PRIME MINISTER AND UNHCR SUGGEST THAT 19 UNDOCUMENTED TIBETANS DETAINED IN WESTERN NEPAL ON JUNE 24 MAY BE TURNED OVER UNHCR. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) ON JUNE 24, NEPALI POLICE OFFICERS ARRESTED 19 UNDOCUMENTED TIBETANS IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF ACCHAM. THE TIBETANS REPORTEDLY HAD CROSSED INTO NEPAL AT THE REMOTE NORTHWESTERN DISTRICT OF HUMLA. AN OFFICE OF TIBET OFFICIAL CONFIRMED THAT TIBETAN REFUGEES COMMONLY USE THIS FAR-WESTERN ROUTE, ALTHOUGH THE EMBASSY KNOWS OF NO PREVIOUS DETENTIONS OF REFUGEES IN THIS DISTANT, LARGELY INACCESSIBLE REGION. ACCORDING TO UNHCR OFFICIALS IN KATHMANDU, THE TIBETANS WERE TRANSPORTED ON JUNE 27 TO KAILALI DISTRICT SOUTH OF ACCHAM, WHERE THEY WILL BE HELD IN DETENTION PENDING FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION.

3. (SBU) ON JUNE 27 UNHCR INFORMED THE HOME MINISTRY BY TELEPHONE OF ITS INTEREST IN THE DETAINED TIBETANS. UNHCR SENT A LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION ON THE SAME DAY REQUESTING THAT THE TIBETANS BE ESCORTED TO KATHMANDU AND HANDED OVER DIRECTLY TO UNHCR FOR PROCESSING AT THE RECEPTION CENTER. AS OF COB JUNE 27, THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION HAD NOT YET RESPONDED TO THE LETTER. NEITHER THE OFFICE OF TIBET NOR THE UNHCR HAS RECEIVED ANY INDICATION THAT THE TIBETANS WILL BE DEPORTED. ON THE CONTRARY, A UNHCR OFFICIAL EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT THE TIBETANS WOULD BE TURNED OVER TO THE ORGANIZATION UPON THEIR ARRIVAL IN KATHMANDU.

4. (SBU) ON JUNE 27 THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THE DETENTIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER SURYA BAHADUR THAPA, URGING THAT THE 19 BE HANDED OVER TO UNHCR IN KEEPING WITH NEPAL'S PAST POLICY OF TOLERANCE TOWARD ASYLUM SEEKERS. THAPA ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE REFUGEES WOULD BE DULY HANDED OVER TO UNHCR, AND ADDED THAT HE IS PREPARING A REPLY TO A JUNE 19 LETTER FROM NINE U.S. CONGRESSMEN PROTESTING THE MAY 31 DEPORTATIONS OF 18 TIBETANS (REFTEL).

5. (SBU) COMMENT. GIVEN THE GON'S REPEATED ASSURANCES (INCLUDING A JUNE 16 LETTER FROM PRIME MINISTER THAPA TO SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN) THAT THE MAY 31 DEPORTATION OF 18 TIBETAN REFUGEES WAS AN ANOMALY THAT WOULD NOT RECUR, POST IS OPTIMISTIC THAT THESE 19 TIBETANS WILL BE PROCESSED QUIETLY AND WITHOUT UNNECESSARY DELAY. HOWEVER, WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION CLOSELY. END COMMENT.

MALINOWSKI